DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 633 CS 506 423

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TITLE Developing the Recruiting/Public Relations Potential of the Forensic Program.
PUB DATE Nov 88
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (74th, New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Debate; Extracurricular Activities; Higher Education; Persuasive Discourse; *Student Recruitment

ABSTRACT

Recruiting strategies for a forensic program may be improved by cooperation between the admissions office and the forensic coach, by using various types of recruiting efforts, and by publicizing the forensic program. Recruiting efforts include: (1) creating pamphlets on the forensic program; (2) having college forensic students judge at high school tournaments; (3) giving workshops for high school students on the college campus; (4) inviting high school students to campus during a college tournament; (5) purchasing mailing lists of potentially interested students; and (6) making use of program alumni as recruiters in local areas. (SR)

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Developing the Recruiting/Public Relations Potential of the Forensic Program

by

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"Indiana University requires that applicants have eight semesters of the most demanding college preparatory work in English grammar, composition, and literature. Historically courses such as acting, drama, debate, film study, mass media, communication, or publications do not fulfill our expectation for the best possible college preparatory courses." (Sindelar, 1988)

This quotation from an article in the Journal of College Admissions stunned me. It is hard to imagine that a high school communication or debate course would not be as demanding as a grammar course. An understanding by the admission office of the work and intensity involved in communication and forensics may be the first step in developing a recruiting strategy on a college campus.

In this paper, I want to examine the responsibility for recruitment in forensics, types of recruitment efforts, and ways to publicize forensic programs.

It would be easy to assess the responsibility, for recruitment should be on the admission professionals in their office. However, often times with high turnover in the admission offices, it is hard to train each of the recruiters about the forensic program. Hilpert explains: "...admission officers often lack knowledge of the mechanisms by which institutional characteristics and marketing efforts operate in tandem. Although they control elements of the admission process, they do not systematically integrate those elements into their thinking." (Hilpert, 1987) It is very difficult for admission professionals to learn about each institutional program. They try and learn about each major and usually are able to talk intelligently to prospective high school seniors.

Because of the inherent problem of learning about forensics, in many colleges the forensic program does most of their own recruiting. At times it is better for students in the forensics program to contact these students. Admission recruiters have a more generic approach to recruiting. An example may be an admission professional's emphasis on attending a small private liberal arts college. Lehman explains this typical recruiter's approach: "At a smaller college, you are likely to find smaller classes, fewer teaching assistants, and a smaller faculty. You may even have the same teacher for several courses during your college career. As one of only a few thousand students, you will always find more personal contact... There is also an advantage to attending a college where faculty members are completely dedicated to teaching and where the ratio of resources to students is greater." (Lehman, 1988)

The admission representative tries to give an overall view of the college and may not know details of specific co-curricular programs--like what tournaments does your forensic team attend? Does your forensic team emphasize individual events or debate? These types of questions may make it necessary for a forensic's team representative to contact the prospective student directly.

The admission office's lack of awareness about forensics may also hurt the team's recruiting. Most colleges offer a no-need honor scholarship program for freshmen. The standard criteria is to evaluate grade point average, ACT or SAT scores, class rank, letters of recommendation, an evaluation of a standard honor's essay, involvement in co-curricular activities, and community service.

It is important that the scholarship committee be made aware of the work and time commitment involved in high school forensics. It is very difficult for this type of committee to evaluate the extra-curricular activities as Abel states: "Extracurricular activities are less important in the selection committee's deliberations than the high school record and the student's writing. Most students who apply to college have participated in several activities, and evaluating a student's commitment and contribution to various activities is difficult." (Abel, 1986)

It is essential that the admission office and forensic coach work very closely together so that there can be mutual education of each other's programs. Without joint cooperation, there can be many unnecessary problems for each office. At the beginning of each school year it is important for forensic team representatives to meet with the admission counselors to inform them about their program.

This leads to the second area of discussion, types of recruitment efforts. The first element for recruiting should be a pamphlet on forensics. This could explain a scholarship program, a team philosophy of forensics, usual tournaments attended, and level of regional or national competition. The admission office may even be willing to pay for the publication of this brochure.

The second type of recruitment effort is asking college forensic students to judge at high school tournaments. Students representing a program should be carefully screened and instructed on how to give professional critiques. This direct contact from one forensic program to another may be the most effective recruiting tool. If possible, it is also great public relations to host or have the head coach judge the final round at the NFL district tournament or the State forensic tournament.

Another type of recruitment effort is having a high school one-day seminar on your campus in the fall. This is great to spotlight the top stars on the college team. Each of them could tell their secret theory formula for their event, and then perform their speech. A two or three week workshop in the summer is also effective in recruiting high school students.

A fourth effective recruiting effort is inviting high school students to campus during a hosting of a college forensic tournament. In most colleges, the admission office will pay for room and board, and arrange for housing and a campus tour.

A fifth effective recruiting tool is utilizing outside resources for marketing. There are names that can be purchased from outside

organizations for recruiting debaters from every state. The National Research Center for College and University Admission (NRCCUA) lists 21,891 debaters from throughout the nation who would be interested in college forensic programs in the 1989-90 school year. These names can be purchased for 12¢ each. NRCCUA offers a unique no-risk guarantee to first time users. They state that the duplication between their lists and other test agencies is low. If a college computer center can run a program to show duplicate names and addresses between sources, the college will pay only for the non-duplicated names. Their toll free number in Kansas City, Missouri is 1-800-446-7436. Many times an admission office budget will pay for these students names. Forensic coaches can then send a recruiting letter to each prospective student with utilization of the admission office staff and computer word processing facilities.

A sixth effective recruiting tool is using the alumni from the forensic program. Many colleges have a special program in the admission office to utilize alumni recruiters in their local area. They are trained and then provided with names of students from their area. They discuss the benefits of attending their alma mater. A more direct program could also be used in forensics with former forensic students recruiting prospective forensic students. Coe and Welch discussed the basis for this new recruiting program: "Current levels of awareness among market groups, perceived quality of education available, and geographic proximity to campus, defined as a 60 mile radius, were found to be the key factors in correctly identifying primary and secondary target markets for further market penetration and expansion. The existence of hundreds of high school and junior college administrators and teachers who were graduates of the university was an added competitive advantage the university found it possessed." (Coe and Welch, 1988) This is a great list of academic personal resources to tap in admission offices and forensics programs.

The third and final section of this paper is ways to publicize forensic programs. The first type of forensic information dissemination should be in-house. Articles should be written after each tournament for the student newspaper. Pictures could also be taken by the in-house photographer to be used for the local media, and the dean should also be sent copies of the forensic articles.

The second type of publication should be to hometown newspapers. After each tournament, each student that wins an award should have an article in their hometown newspaper. This is a great public relations project for the school and forensic program throughout the region and state. The local paper should also be sent a news story after each tournament to publish, and local radio and TV should also receive a copy of this news.

The third type of publication involves a publicity campaign with radio and TV. Many TV and radio stations have a coffee hour show for local PSA's or interviews. This is a great opportunity for the community to learn about forensics. These interviews with the forensic coach could happen two or three times a year. One show could be about the upcoming season and new freshmen recruits. Another show could be

about the highlights of the year and the upcoming national tournament, and the final show could be a success story about nationals. Talk show hosts often welcome a call, as they have trouble coming up with local interest stories. These same shows can also be done at local community service organizations.

In each of these publicity sessions the emphasis should be on the students in the program and their accomplishments. Students like being asked to accept some professional responsibility for recruiting or participating in a public relations session for the community. This is another method to increase their growth as speakers and their professional development as students. In all cases these programs will increase the visibility of the forensic squads and make them an integral part of each campus.

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